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ABSTRACT

The discussion of educating handicapped children without special classes emphasizes the importance of looking at the educational process in socio-psychological terms. Referred to are some of the unsuccessful results of segregating students, such as achievement of similar or smaller academic gains, perpetuation of much of the mild mental retardation observed in schools (particularly that which is culturally influenced), and psychological damage to the segregated students. Removal of the stigma attached to special class placement and development of social skills are seen as major reasons for integration in a regular class with support services provided as needed. Discussed are considerations relating to the feasibility of regular class placement: flexibility of school structure; amenability of regular teachers; age, ability, and achievement range of school population; suburban versus urban students and their particular problems; degree of handicap; and ability to make learning potential assessments. (KW)

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STUDIES IN LEARNING POTENTIAL

COMMENTS ON PROVIDING SPECIAL EDUCATION

WITHOUT SPECIAL CLASSES

BY

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Comments on Providing Special Education without Special Classes[1]

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Clearly the pendulum swing is away from segregating children in need of special educational services in isolated, intact, mostly day-long programs. There is an active search for alternative organizational strategies to provide services to the handicapped child, which can maintain him in a regular class with his peers but provide him access to the specialized help he may require for portions of the school day. This principle of integration has been commonly used with the perceptually handicapped, and to a lesser extent, with visually impaired children. It has not constituted usual practice with other mildly handicapped children, those defined mainly by an individual IQ test as mildly mentally retarded, or by whatever criteria, as emotionally disturbed. Children in these latter groups constitute the largest proportion of all identified handicapped children. Those considered mildly retarded come largely from poor, and/or nonwhite, and/or non-English-speaking homes, and present largely school identified problems in academic learning. Almost none, except those with manifest organic brain damage, are identified prior to school entry, and they tend to disappear into the larger population after leaving school. From 67% to 80%, depending on the study, become economically independent as adults.*

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*The evidence for these statements is available, e.g., Sarason and Gladwyn (1958).

Historically, special classes for the mildly retarded were established to reduce heterogeneity among children who were deemed able to profit from the academic curriculum. It was assumed that segregated groupings of slow learners would result in the availability of specialized instructional services and would provide a more comfortable and secure environment where they could learn without the prospect of continuing failure and peer rejection they had experienced in the regular grades. Studies of the results of segregating children into special classes largely have shown these children tend to make the same or smaller academic gains than those maintained in regular class and who received no special educational help. The finding that children in special classes feel better about themselves than those maintained in the regular grades may be suspect since the greater comfort reported may be a function of the child's reference group. Folman and Budoff (1971) found that more special class adolescents feel equal or superior in ability to their special classmates, but markedly less confident about their ability when they compare themselves to chronological age peers in the regular grades.

Placement in segregated classes for the mildly retarded is made primarily on the basis of a low score on a discriminatory "intelligence test" which in fact merely confirms the child's low probability of successful academic school completion unless drastic measures are taken. The children are placed in segregated programs that do not provide individualized special education services. They are usually denied access to the remedial services available in the school - remedial reading, speech, perceptual handicap or

counseling help and to the art, music, manual arts, domestic science, and gym teachers. There is no "special" curriculum, few special educational materials are available, and the possibility of truly individualized instruction for the needs of these very serious school failing children is absent. The administrative practices dictated by state laws and regulations often mandate segregated programs for children, and may "create" and perpetuate much of the mild mental retardation observed in schools.

Special class teachers may also have a professional ego investment in the child's failure. Babad (1971) recently reported from our laboratory that when the special class teacher is told the child is more able to learn than the IQ or school records indicate (by performance on a Learning Potential assessment procedure (1969)), the teachers derogated these children as individuals and learners in the year end ratings as compared with their earlier ratings, and these children made lower achievement gains. Babad hypothesized that the teachers, especially the less experienced ones, defensively needed to perceive these children as less able, and so prove the accuracy of the IQ-based "prediction" that placed them in the special class.

While the simmering dissatisfaction with segregated programs has been brewing for many years (Johnson, 1962; Dunn, 1968), a potent crystallizing influence has been the dissatisfaction of the now-vocal poor with the educational and psychological damage accorded their children by placement in segregated programs, especially for the mentally retarded. A series of legal suits challenging the use of IQ tests for placement, the discriminatory network of practices

related to children classified as mentally retarded, and in one suit filed in Boston, the competence of school psychologists to make the often difficult differential diagnosis, have also begun to influence school system and professional practice.

Special classes largely serve to exclude "deviant" children from the lock-step graded structure of traditional schools. What is remarkable is that though we are aptly cognizant of the diversity among children as to personality, interpersonal competence, learning styles and behaviors, the traditional school organization allows largely two options, either accommodation within the one teacher - 25 child classroom, or expulsion into a segregated class for deviants, e.g., "mentally retarded," "emotionally disturbed," etc.

A major reason for integration is to remove the stigma attached to the formal designation clearly stated by a child's placement in a segregated class. Generically, what is required to integrate handicapped children in regular class home rooms at the elementary level is a support system that will provide for the special educational needs of these children within the context of the school. What one seeks to do is allow the child to maintain his base within a regular classroom, like any other child, but get his special educational needs fulfilled outside the classroom as necessary. The regular classroom teacher, with the aid of this support structure can, in consultation with the remedial specialists, organize a program that includes the child within his regular classroom activities to the greatest extent possible. The support structure is available to provide for his special needs. The child with special educational needs can then be integrated even if only for social purposes and

for nonacademic subjects, i.e., art, music, shop, lunch, recess, gym, and home room. The formal label, which has such debilitating consequences for children, can be dispensed with in the school. Maintaining the child in a regular class home room allows him the normalizing experiences of being with other children as close to him in chronological age as he can manage successfully. Socially, the child may feel that while he may not be as good a student as others, he is still fit to associate with others during the all-important school hours. He can develop social skills in association with his peers, and learn to live in the society of man as opposed to accommodating himself to a deviant social status as "retarded" or "crazy." Educationally, programs have to be arranged to fit his needs within an overall administrative structure that permits it. It may be that the child might spend most of his school day in various specialized educational arrangements, e.g., remedial reading groups, a gym class to improve motoric functioning if that would help him socially and/or academically, empirical-manipulative curricula to learn science, math, or social studies so that verbal-expressive or reading problems will not preclude access to these subject matters and retard the child's continuing learning. Successful attainments in manipulative, minimally verbal units might well change his concept of himself as a student. It might provide leverage for the teacher to engage him in working with subjects he finds more difficult, e.g., reading. These programs should not be limited only to children of his own ability level since many children require remedial reading help, not only those in low or retarded IQ classifications. Many children are clumsy,

need remedial reading, could benefit from manipulative science or math studies, less reading-dependent social studies, etc. The concept is somehow trying to find a way to make the school organization attuned to the heterogeneous needs of children and is especially critical for those children from poor urban and rural areas.

Integration of children with special educational needs into the regular classes requires a school with a broad range of educational options, preferably one that is philosophically and structurally organized to deal with heterogeneity among children. Logically, this type of school should tolerate a broader range of diversity, even of "mis" -behaviors and intellectual inadequacy. Tolerance for a range of "deviant" behavioral and learning styles is at least partially a phenomenological characteristic of the teachers and administrators, and partially a reflection of the flexibility or rigidity of the school structure. Empirically, it probably can be related to frequency of referral for possible placement of children in classes for the "emotionally disturbed," the "mildly retarded," etc. Presumably the faculty of a truly nongraded or open concept school has a broader tolerance for diversity among its children, and sees its challenge as finding ways to accommodate all children within its structure. That is, it sees the school structure as having to create constructive options for all its children. By contrast, the traditional school organization places the onus on the children, and views them as having to accommodate to the few educational options available.

This is not to argue that all children can be accommodated within general education, no matter how flexibly organized. The

critical issue in considering integration programs for the handicapped is in finding ways of determining the extent to which various types of school structures can be "stretched" to accommodate the great diversity of educational needs of its students. But there are limitations to this "stretch." Regardless of the viewpoint of the teaching staff, moderately and severely handicapped children may not be able to be accommodated within the formal academic portions of the school day, though they may be included in various nonacademic programs - music, recess, lunch; perhaps gym, shop, art. That is, psychotic, extremely hyperactive, moderately and severely retarded, or multiple-handicapped children require specialized care and treatment and objectively should not be integrated in a regular class. Even when behavior problems are not a critical dimension, these children will not progress at a rate that will provide sufficient satisfaction for the regular class teacher, and be fair, in proportion of time and energy they require, to the other children in the group. Also, unlike the mildly handicapped child, these children have great difficulty relating in social, athletic, and other nonacademic areas with the other "normal" children. I believe we will continue to require essentially intact class programs for children whose behavior and/or learning potential dictates the need for very specialized care and educational help or very limited school-types of attainments. Though they may still be working in a largely segregated program, they can interact usefully with "normal" children in the same school, e.g., an open concept school. In one such program, it is our impression that there may be substantial benefit for the "normal" children, who, we think, may express

more positive attitudes toward these discernibly different children.

While flexible school structures, e.g., nongraded or open concept schools, team teaching areas, etc., are ideally suited philosophically and organizationally to integration programs, various other options are being tried. The Minneapolis and Syracuse schools have been using resource teachers in traditional schools to tutor children individually or in small groups, who would otherwise have had to be placed in segregated programs. The Hamilton School in Newton, Massachusetts, uses the special class teacher in a similar resource capacity for the mildly mentally retarded children who have been integrated into a nongraded school. Gottlieb, Leodas and Budoff (1971) have described a Remedial Learning Center in which the remedial knowhow available within the traditional or nongraded school is concentrated under an umbrella structure. This allows coordinated planning among specialists within the building - remedial reading, speech, perceptual handicap, special class teachers for the mildly retarded and disturbed, school psychologist, social worker - permitting clearly articulated goals for the remedial services in light of the educational needs of the children within the building. It establishes channels of communication among specialists so that each can learn from each other and plan with each other for specific children. Also, close communication can be established with classroom teachers resulting in mutual support and a flow of materials and ideas from the Learning Center specialists into classrooms. Workshops for the classroom teacher at their request might be conducted by the specialists, and a structure exists around which to develop parent-school contacts. There are

many other experimental programs at present.

Some general considerations that relate to the feasibility of integrating handicapped children into a school structure are:

1. The flexibility of the school structure. Quite clearly, open and nongraded schools probably give the teaching staff more flexibility in arranging individualized programs for educationally needy children than schools that are traditionally organized with self-contained classrooms.

2. The amenability of teachers in the regular classes to accommodate children within their rooms who have been formally defined as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. Amenability is partially a function of the mythology that children classified as mentally retarded are unable to learn, and that the emotionally disturbed child cannot be educated because he needs the care of a physician or psychotherapist or something of that sort. By contrast, many teachers are quite willing to deal with children with "severe attention problems" or "severe phonic difficulties," and with many types of management problems when they have not been formally labeled with the brand of mental retardation or emotional disturbance.

When one integrates these labeled children into schools, even with well intentioned, well meaning teachers who verbally indicate they will try to work with the child as they would any other child, their fears and hesitations and their sense that they will get little payoff from their efforts often work against them. In a number of integration arrangements we have been observing and evaluating, we have seen the need to support the teachers either directly, by taking problem children that they are having difficulty

with from them in an exchange arrangement, or indirectly, by being useful to the faculty at large by catering to their perceived needs. Furthermore, we have perceived a remarkable isolation and lack of professional communication among regular class teachers regarding children who present educational or management problems. Since all change ultimately involves people, in this instance, teachers, principals, administrators and school psychologists, the manner in which an integration program is approached and the need for support for the staff is an absolute imperative. In-service training programs to help teachers learn how to communicate and work together, and to help them acquire a better understanding of the implications of individualizing instruction represents a major and absolutely necessary component of integration programs.

3. The age, ability and achievement range of the children available in a particular school. A K-3 school provides fewer opportunities for flexible programming than a K-8 school. The greater spread of school competencies in the K-8 school allows one to tap the powerful potential of older students serving as teachers of younger students. Even though the older child may read poorly, he can be used to tutor younger children letters or even the sound patterns if he gets some help to attain this status. The junior high school student who has always had difficulty learning can work with primary grade children around beginning reading and math skills, and will gain in self esteem from being assigned the status of teacher and from being able to help someone else learn. What evidence is available shows marked increases in both the tutor and tutee's achievement levels as a function of these kinds

of involvements. We have failed to understand systematically how to constructively utilize the intrinsic attractiveness to children of children helping other children. The cross-age tutoring model can enhance the progress of the low achieving student, can be used to aid the socialization of socially maladroit children, etc. Properly conceptualized with appropriate goals, older students can be a powerful and positive influence on the laggard younger child in many areas of importance to schools. The change in ascribed status should promote personal maturity and tolerance to others in the older child.

4. Inner city school programs at any one grade frequently reflect a very broad span of skill competence, with a high incidence of low achievement. Many so-called mildly retarded children, even those who are completely illiterate, will find other children with their poor achievement pattern in their grade, regardless of the IQ they attained. Thus, integration programs which group students by attainment level can result in additional services for many educationally needy children, not only the "retarded," and should include a broad cross section of children, not only those potentially special class students. Teachers who understand that a support system is available to them for help in programming for laggard children, regardless of IQ or diagnostic category, will participate more enthusiastically.

<u>It is critical not to establish special educational programs only for the special class child but to seek ways to include a broad range of children</u>. We don't want to develop a new type of low track and we lose the energizing power provided by children who

have specific problems but have not been more or less total academic failures. This may have to be done by having more than one type of activity present in the Learning Center. In our Learning Centers, we have not developed any new programs unless the first group was composed of a broad range of ability.

Integrating IQ-defined mildly retarded students in suburban schools is inherently more difficult because the average functioning level at any grade is high, and there is a narrow range of achievement levels at any given grade level. Also, qualitatively, a larger proportion of those placed in segregated programs for the mildly retarded in these schools are middle class children who have organic brain damage or other complications that place upward limits on the child's educability, or may require specialized educational treatments. By contrast, almost all children in segregated programs in urban schools are poor children who have failed to progress academically. Many have "behavior" problems.

5. As indicated, the nature of the child that is to be integrated is also of some consequence. Few schools can integrate a moderately or severely retarded child into academic school programs for any appreciable portions of the day. In one nongraded school which integrated IQ-defined EMRs, and in which the teachers were devoted to trying to help these children succeed academically, a trainable child was also included. This child proved to be so frustrating to the professional needs of the teachers that the child was removed after several months. This school, while able to accommodate very low achieving children in the context of a middle class population of relatively high-achieving students, could not

"stretch" itself to accommodate this trainable girl.

6. There are important implications for testing. The focus must change from the preoccupation with ultimate outcome as represented by the IQ. The low IQ score obtained by the mildly handicapped child foretells his probable academic failure, barring a dramatic change in educational demand or the child's own ability to cope with school. It acts to reinforce the teachers' disinclination to teach academic materials in a manner that will challenge the child, since, ostensibly, he will not profit from the instruction. But given his probable continuing failure if the same conditions continue, is the child intrinsically or environmentally dumb? That is, can he profit from appropriate instruction if the demands, the contents and the situation are dramatically altered?

Budoff (1969) has described a learning potential assessment procedure in which the child is tested on nonverbal reasoning problems prior to and following tuition on principles relevant to solution of the problems. A large proportion of IQ-defined retardates, who come from low income homes and have no history of brain injury show marked ability to solve these tasks, when they are presented in the learning potential assessment format. The data indicate the more able students by this criterion are educationally, not mentally retarded and the ability they demonstrate prior to or following tuition is not specific to the particular learning potential task. The students do,however, appear to have a generalized verbal-expressive deficit, though we are now beginning to look at the remediability of this deficit.*

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*Space does not allow more specific discussion but appropriate reprints providing support for these statements are available on request from the author.

Learning Potential assessment permits one to differentiate between the low IQ children who can and cannot profit from instruction on the reasoning task. It appears to have implications for the approach by which the more able students might be educated (see Budoff, Meskin, and Harrison, 1971). In a similar vein, a testing program for educationally needy children should be designed which would consider both present and potential functioning levels. This would allow one to describe present status, and the child's amenability for training on the task(s).

If there are a broader set of educational alternatives than the dichotomous regular or special class alternatives, the diagnostic evaluation should be less concerned with the classification decision, and focus on obtaining data which would be useful for designing a suitable educational plan for a given child. In turn,this could be presented as part of a team planning effort in consultation with the child's teacher and a broad range of specialists.

In closing, we should remember that segregated classes were developed as a means of providing special help to the child who was too difficult to teach academically or manage behaviorally in the regular classroom. This need realistically still exists since one teacher can only provide so much for a diverse group of children, and is trained as a generalist. There is only so much one human being, however dedicated, can accomplish. However, if, as some administrators insist, the only acceptable alternative to special class must be to work with the classroom teacher to help her accommodate the educationally needy child within her own classroom (see

Lilly, 1971), special classes will continue to plague us, and deny general education the range of educational options required to reduce the high incidence of school failure. Designing integration programs for "handicapped" children requires administrators to think flexibly about the needs of all their children, both instructionally and socially. The more positively the child feels about himself and his status as a student, the more he will work with persistence and involvement in school subjects. It requires administrators to conceptualize the school as the complex social system it really is, and to organize it so that it fulfills its purposes for the broadest diversity of children.

It should also be apparent that integration by whatever set of options, are administrative or organizational solutions. They have no clear implications for instructional contents. This is a separate subject that requires extensive consideration. The broader the range of options available within a given school, the broader the richness of remedial talent available, the more tolerant the teachers and administrators are to "deviant" behavior or learning, the more children can be educated successfully within the school, and the fewer children will be expelled into a mildly handicapped category. When they are rejected, they will tend to represent extreme instances of deviancy - autism or schizophrenia, severely acting out or hyperactive children, severely physically damaged children, moderate to severely retarded children, etc.

As psychologists we should consider whether we build a chronically failing child's sense of competence as a student more rapidly by facilitating and assuring success in meaningful school subjects, or

by counseling him to "understand" his failure. My prejudice is that successful achievements beget an increasing personal sense of competence as a student. This sense of competence should have generalizing and self-generating power, if the dosages of success are carefully watched. But frustrations must also be introduced and the child must learn to cope with challenges that are within his reach, if he will reach for them. School psychologists must rethink their roles as testers and counselors and begin to think of themselves as learning facilitators or engineers in the broadest terms. We must learn to think collaboratively and imaginatively with teachers about how a specific child's problems might be solved. We must become less obsessed with ultimate outcomes, except perhaps for the extremely deviant child. Most of all, we must lose the very narrow focus of options that we psychologists entertain.

This paper emphasizes the particular importance of looking at the educational process, particularly for laggard children, in socio-psychological terms. It seems to me that school psychologists may be the professionals in the school who can most easily contribute this point of view to the educational planning process and add a very appreciable increment to the educational and socializing power of the (urban) school.

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Footnotes

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